

"At Once the Monarch's and the Muse's Seats":  
The Political and the Pastoral in Windsor Forest

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)  
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"At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats":  
The Political and the Pastoral in Windsor Forest

Windsor Forest was published in 1713 as one of several poems commemorating the Peace of Utrecht, signed that year. Dedicated to George Granville, Lord Landsdowne, a Tory who was instrumental in effecting the treaty, the poem celebrates the Tory rule in England as the height of civilization. Despite the dominance of this political theme throughout the poem, to read Windsor Forest as a mere allegory, however, is to misread it. In his praising of a harmonious Tory state, Alexander Pope also gives us his pastoral vision of an idealized nature.

#### Historical Background

As Anglo-French relations worsened in the late seventeenth century, England became increasingly concerned with the dynastic ambitions of Louis XIV. Louis had been expanding France commercially and financially since the French Revolution, and the English feared a territorial expansion of his power. When Louis sent French troops into the Spanish Netherlands and parts of the Rhine in 1701, this expansion seemed imminent.

Hoping to prevent a union of the French and Spanish crowns, William III, reigning King of England, entered England into an alliance with the Netherlands and Austria in the fall of that year. By the time William had died in 1702, Parliament had already voted

for troops and supplies to go to war against France; John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, was appointed captain-general of the Anglo-Dutch forces. Bolstered by his fellow Whigs and his wife's influence on the newly crowned Queen Anne, Marlborough scored several victories for England over France.

Despite these victories, however, the cost of maintaining an army severely drained England. Whig City merchants such as the Hudson's Bay Company and the East India Company offered immediate credit to England, but the interest to pay back England's war debt came mainly from taxation. Land owners were the worst hit by taxes, and Tory gentry who suffered became increasingly bitter towards the Whigs and the war.

Public support for the war waned, too, as the national debt grew and the war drug on with no end in sight. And Anne, siding with the Tories, eventually grew disenchanted with the Whig's influence and the dominance of the Duchess of Marlborough. In 1710, amidst growing public support for peace, Anne dismissed Marlborough and replaced him with Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke. With the help of these new advisers, Anne finally negotiated the Peace of Utrecht in 1713.

In the beginning of the poem, the landscape of the forest is a metaphor for the political stability of post-war England. The hills and valleys of Windsor Forest, along with its woodlands and plains, and earth and water strive, "Not Chaos-like together, crushed and bruised/But as the world, harmoniously confused" (13-14). Along with this order is prosperity: deserts yield fruitful fields; "Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand" (39); and "industry sits smiling on the Plains" (40). As Gurr notes, Pope attributes this prosperity to Queen Anne and her signing of the treaty (16). "Peace and plenty tell," he writes, "a STUART reigns" (42).

In doing so, Pope makes two statements about the Peace of Utrecht. First, on a number of occasions, the Whigs had rejected Louis XIV's offering for a peace treaty, and it wasn't until a Tory came to governmental power that a treaty was signed and peace came to England; thus, through Queen Anne, the Tories have returned peace to the country.

Second, because of a particular provision of the treaty, the Tories have brought "plenty" to England as well. During negotiations for the Peace of Utrecht, the prospect of an English occupation of the West Indies was the cause of controversy between the two political parties. Although the Whigs had intended, through the war, to win over the Spanish colonies in the West Indies, the Tories did not. Once Queen Anne came to power, then, she refused to push for possession of the colonies, advocating instead that England get the exclusive right to conduct the slave

trade in the Indies and to control virtually the maritime commerce there. These provisions, ratified in the treaty, are alluded to in the introduction:

Let India boast her plants, nor envy we  
The weeping amber or the balmy tree,  
While by our oaks the precious loads are borne,  
And realms commanded which those trees adorn (29-32).

As Brown notes, the trees represent English navy ships, but more specifically, the Stuart monarchy, for the oak is its traditional symbol; India, of course, is not the continent, but the West Indies, as indicated by the "balmy tree," which was particularly associated with the Indies during the eighteenth century (29). Thus, by writing of the oaks as commanding the Indies, Pope is referring to England's virtual control over them through the English navy, which will distribute its riches to other parts of the world (Wasserman, 141). And since this lucrative venture would undoubtedly help pay off England's heavy debt, largely caused by the Whigs' reluctance to end the war, the Tories have helped to assure prosperity for the financially unstable country. In accurately crediting a Stuart with the treaty, then, Pope points out that the Tories have not only brought about a harmonious state, but a financially stable one as well.

Pope also uses the opening scene to introduce a pastoral element into the poem--the theme of concordia discors. This theory, the idea that reconciliation of opposites produces a harmony, operates

in this poem as the proper order of Windsor Forest. In the forest, where "though all things differ, all agree" (16), russet plains extend while bluish hills ascend; trees shun each other's shades; and waving groves partly admit and exclude the sunlight like a coy nymph vacillating between indulgence and repression of her lover's addresses. Rivaling Olympus, the forest is rife with deities--Pan appears with his flocks, and Pomona with her head crowned in fruit. By juxtaposing the concordia discors theme with the presence of gods, Pope illustrates that ordered variety is the acceptable, and thus the proper, law of nature.

In order for concordia discors to exist, opposing forces must be restrained by each other; if not, then the forest's harmony is spoiled, and the excess eventually must be destroyed. Such is the lesson of the first of a trio of hunting scenes, which concerns William I's takeover of the New Forest of Hampshire for use as a royal hunting preserve. Unrestrained in his power, Pope writes, William violated the proper order of the forest; because of his tyranny, the forest degenerated, becoming a "dreary desert" (44) and a "gloomy waste" (44). Swains died in their ripened fields; showers were distilled; and towns were leveled and churches emptied.

Pope emphasizes the tyranny of William's reign with his choice of words. In contrast to the "peace," plenty," and nobility of the Stuarts' age, the era of William the Conqueror was "despotic," "savage," and blasphemous. Even William's nickname implies savagery; Nimrod, an Old Testament character, is traditionally considered the model of cruel hunters, tyrants, and men of war. In

conjuring these images, Pope illustrates the malignancy of unbalanced nature.

As the law of concordia discors states, however, this unbalance must eventually be corrected. And so it must be; William's son Rufus is killed during a hunt, and his own death is hastened by a hunting accident. Succeeding monarchs, we read, acted in harmony with the forest and insured a productive existence for England, the desert disappearing and harvests spreading in its place. Pope, again, illustrates that natural harmony prevails.

By using William I as the tyrant of the story, Pope has the opportunity not only to comment on the proper order of the forest but also to attack the Whiggish reign of William III. Besides having the same names, William I and William III have other factual similarities. Both men were foreigners--William I was, of course, from Normandy, and William III from Holland. Both liked hunting as a form of war (Clark, 27), and both came to the throne by military force (Moore, 234).

In addition, several references to William I in the poem are easily transferable to William III. The deaths of both were hastened by horseriding accidents, each becoming "at once the Chaser and at once the Prey" (82). William I was severely injured when leaping over a ditch on horseback, and died soon after; his namesake, while riding one day, broke his collarbone when his horse stumbled on a molehill in Hampton Court (Moore, 233-234). Subsequently, both men were "denied a grave" (80). Finally, as Aden notes, one passage of the William I scene is preeminently transferable to William III:



Aw'd by his nobles, by his Commons curst,  
Th'Opressor rul'd Tyrannick where he durst,  
Stretch'd o'er the Poor, and Church, his Iron Rod,  
And served alike his Vassals and his God (73-76).

These events are analogous to William III's actions--the burden of his taxation, Parliament's resistance to his takeover, and the heretical tendencies of Dutch theology (Aden, 64). It is clear, then, that the hunt is also an allusion to William III's reign and the war, which was begun under him.

In contrast to William, Pope represents succeeding monarchs as pitying their subjects, relaxing the forest's laws, and happily looking on as peaceful villages are built in the forest (Moore, 235). In contrast to the Nimrod of the Whig era is one successor in particular--"Brittania's goddess, [who] rears/Her cheerful Head, and leads the golden years" (91-92)--Queen Anne (Clark, 26-27). The reference is unmistakably an allusion to the treaty; what the Whig king had refused, the Stuart queen gave her people--the Peace of Utrecht.

In the third hunting scene, Pope again attacks the Whigs, but this time in mythic rather than historical terms. Borrowing from Ovid's Metamorphosis, Pope illustrates his point with the story of Pan and Syrinx. Lodona, representing Syrinx, becomes "eager of the chase" (181) one day while hunting, and strays beyond the boundaries of Windsor Forest, enflaming the desire of Pan. Fleeing in vain, Lodona cannot outrun him, and he rapes her. She prays to

Diana for forgiveness, and "melting as in Tears she lay/in a soft silver stream dissolv'd away" (203-204).

This scene is both political and pastoral. Its pastoral meaning is an illustration of the necessity of concordia discors. Although nature is not necessarily hostile to man, it has the capacity for violence when humans ignore natural limits. In the introduction we see Pan as a peaceful shepherd. Now his capacity for violence is stirred by Lodona's overzealousness (Morris, 114). The farther she strays, the more she increases her chances for harm; "Her flight increased his fire" (184), Pope writes. Once Lodona is transformed into the river, she reflects contemplation. Now lingering, Lodona mirrors the mountains, trees, and flocks of Windsor Forest, something that an agitated river could not do; and she reflects a contemplative shepherd, rather than acting as the dynamic huntress (Wasserman, 155-156). Lodona, however, does not exchange action for contemplation. In mirroring the shepherd, she displays the contemplative side of life, but in rushing into the Thames she displays some of her former energy (Morris, 124). Therefore, through concordia discors, dynamic passion and restraining reason come to terms in man.

The scene in turn represents the Tory perspective on the war. The war for the Spanish Succession, having begun under a Whig, and having been mainly funded by Whigs, had been opposed by the Tories almost from the beginning. In spite of England's probability for success, the country was heavily in debt, and the Tories argued that the economic situation alone was reason to end the war. And since on a number of occasions, Louis XIV had suggested a peace

treaty, it seemed to the Tories that indeed the Whigs were overzealous in their passion for war.

In Lodona's straying beyond the confines of Windsor Forest--which is later defined as Anne's "shady Empire" (369)--Pope represents the Whigs' disregarding England and its harmony (Wasserman, 136). They are acting against their own nature as well. Lodona's name, of course, represents the Loddon river, which flows into the Thames. By twice referring later to the river as the "Loddon slow" (215, 340), Pope identifies the true nature of the river as lingering, which Lodona violates in her overzealousness. Thus, the Whigs have violated the true nature of man.

In disregarding their reasonable limits, the Whigs put themselves into a chaotic war, or into the hands of Pan. As in the William scene, the chaser became the prey; the Whigs were eventually shoved out of office, and the Tories were ushered in (Wasserman, 156). Then, like Lodona, they begged for the protection of concordia discors and are somewhat granted it in the form of the Peace of Utrecht. "At length great ANNA said--Let Discord cease," Pope writes, and "She said, the World obeyed, and all was Peace" (327-328). Through the Tories, then, a violent Whig country was transformed into a nation reflecting the concordia discors of the forest.

The balance of the present Tory state is the subject of the central hunt; the scene illustrates the controlled activity of the hunt under the leadership of Queen Anne. In "genial spring" (135), for example, a fisher patiently awaits a catch from the plenteous streams of Windsor Forest, in contrast to the brutal killers who

preyed on innocent swains during William's reign. The picture that Pope paints for us here is one of peacefulness, not chaos. In addition, the Tyrian color of the perch fins, which alludes to a rare purple dye of Classical times, as well as the silver of the eels and the gold of the carps' scales, refers to the economic prosperity of the post-treaty England. Presiding over this sylvan scene is the "Empress of the Main" (164), Queen Anne, who acts as a Diana of the woods (Clark, p. 28). Armed with silver bows and accompanied by virgin disciples, Diana roams Windsor Forest as a huntress, but as a peaceful one. "Queen Anne and her hunting suggest here the Tory political view," writes Clark, and as if an imperative: "Sign the peace treaty between the warring nations and turn England and the world into an idealized Windsor Forest, where man is one with nature" (28).

The oneness of nature in this hunting scene is another example of Pope's discordia concors ideal. The men hunt in four successive seasons, whose complementary nature is the harmony by which God creates "Order in Variety" (95); rather than being uncontrolled and chaotic, the hunters work within nature's order, and pursue hunting, fishing, and fowling in their corresponding seasons (Wasserman, 155). In addition, the land, the air, and the water supply a variety of game; streams, for instance, house a diverse "scaly breed" (139) of pikes, eel, perch, carp, and trouts, while the air provides pheasants, woodcocks, and lapwings.

Hunting in this ordered diversity is well accorded, because it works with nature, not against it. Under William's despotic reign, "In vain kind seasons swelled the teeming Grain" (53), but now the

sandy wilds in Windsor Forest are spread with yellow harvests, and the woods are full of game. "Because man is in accord with nature," Wasserman writes, "nature is in accord with him" (155).

## II

In the Lodona myth we examined the two opposing forces in man, which must work in a concordia discors for him to live. As the central figure of the poem, Lodona not only embodies this harmony but also represents the turning point of Windsor Forest, as its focus switches from the active side of life to the contemplative. Pope uses the following scenes as well to discuss the political and the pastoral elements of the poem.

In the first scene, Sir William Trumbull, a former English secretary of state, retires to Windsor Forest, finding "humbler joys" (239) in contemplation. While before the forest had been a ground for battle, now it acts as a classroom for learning. In the forest, he studies chemistry, astronomy, religion, and other subjects through contemplation rather than direct experience. Marking "the course of rolling orbs on high" (215), Trumbull estimates but does not actually experience anything; he examines maps and charts of the world, traveling with his eyes rather than his feet; and he "lives past ages over" (248) by reading learned documents from long ago (Wasserman, 148).

Just as Lodona has metamorphosed from the active huntress to the passive river, in his retirement Trumbull, then, moves gradually from his former physical existence as a statesman to a virtually intellectual one as a scholar. The order of his studies, from medicine, which is the most physical of the studies, to religion, which is the most metaphysical, suggests the transformation into a contemplative life (Wasserman, 148). However, just as Lodona still

embodies the opposing forces of action and contemplation, so too does Trumbull. In his Windsor Forest retirement, he finds joy not only in "successive study" (240) but in exercise; and even when pondering ethics, he walks through the forest. Once again, Windsor Forest is a setting for concordia discors.

Politically, Trumbull's retirement scene suggests the compromise of the Peace of Utrecht. The treaty was a Tory peace, negotiated over the objections of the Whigs, who advocated an uncompromised victory. By illustrating Trumbull's happy retirement from politics and war, mentioning the successful earlier retirement of Atticus (Pope's name for the eighteenth century poet Joseph Addison), and noting the Roman general Scipius's admiration for the contemplative life, Pope illustrates approval of a harmonious life and consequently the compromise of the war.

Because of this compromise, Trumbull, and for that matter, the English people as a whole, are now free to pursue the study of chemistry, astronomy, and other sciences which had been gaining ground since the early seventeenth century, as well as pursue metaphysics, which became increasingly popular as a field of study at the time of the writing of Windsor Forest. The Peace of Utrecht, then, is spiritually and intellectually prosperous for the English people.

In the second contemplation scene, an imaginary poet retires to Windsor Forest; like Lodona, who begged Diana to be returned to the shades of Windsor Forest, he asks the Muses to bear him to "sequestered scenes/The bowery mazes, and surrounding greens" (261-262). And like Lodona, who was returned to the forest not to

live actively but to reflect the forest for the shepherd, and like Trumbull, who retired to the forest to live through intellectual pursuits and to reflect on his spiritual existence, the poet retires to the forest not simply to live there, but to explore the forest's existence through the representation of poets. Seeming to rove through "consecrated walks" (267), he hears the music of venerable poets; he observes, too, "eternal wreaths" (265) growing on Cooper's Hill through the hill's existence in Denham's poem, Cooper's Hill (Wasserman, 152). And he hears the groves rejoicing and the forest ringing through the poetry of the poet-statesman Granville. The scene is another illustration of concordia discors; the poet balances his life through his existence in the real Windsor Forest and his contemplation on the imaginative forest as painted by the poets. Correspondingly, because it is the setting for both action and contemplation, the forest is in concordia discors itself.

Windsor Forest is the scene of action and contemplation for other poets as well. Here in the forest, Surrey, "the Granville of a former age" (292), lived actively, finding victory with his lance and dancing gracefully; but here, too, "in the same shades the Cupids tuned his lyre" (295), and Surrey began to write of Geraldine, the love object of his sonnets. This likening of Surrey to Granville hints at the political meaning of the scene. Surrey and his family were accomplished soldiers, often being called upon for help in times of political turmoil. In later years, however, Surrey became primarily an intellectual, writing Elizabethan sonnets and other kinds of sixteenth century poetry.



Correspondingly, Granville, the dedicatee of the poem and a Tory statesman who had helped negotiate the Peace of Utrecht, was also a poet. Just as Surrey metamorphosed from a soldier to a poet, it is time for Granville, then, to leave the political arena and turn to writing poetry. Granville's retirement, like Trumbull's, suggests the need for England as a whole to end the war and return to the harmony of Windsor Forest for the purpose of contemplation and study.

In the final paragraphs of the scene, Granville is called upon to sing of England's monarchs. As Pope himself notes, Granville mentions Edward III because he was born in Windsor Forest, but also because he triumphed over France; Granville notes Edward's victory over Cressy, and of Edward's adding to the shield the lilies of France through conquest. But since the ultimate goal of the poem is to commemorate the signing of a peace treaty, Pope adds to the monarch list Henry VII and Edward IV, who fought each other for the kingdom, but who are now united in their Windsor Forest graves (Wasserman, 16). According to Wasserman, in this eclectic history of Windsor's monarchs, Pope points out that, as the Spanish Wars just showed, England is always France's master. "But it has also revealed the meaninglessness of mere victory, since ultimately victor and vanquished must be united in the endless peace of the grave," he writes (160).

But such unity is possible even in life. With the execution of Charles I came a temporary cease of the Stuart reign and consequently all of England's later problems. During the Commonwealth reign, England suffered from a plague, civil war, and

the London fire; such ills were not controlled until the crown was returned to a Stuart, Queen Anne, who ended the discord through the treaty.

In the future, this unity will not be limited to England. At the "blest moment" (329) of the signing of the treaty, Father Thames appears, as the alternate tides of England join in a concordia discors--the swift Kennet and the slow Loddon, the chalky Wey and the transparent Vandalis, and the gulfy Lee and the sullen Mole. Politically, as Mack notes, the scene represents a united Britain "in which the waters of the Tory countryside contribute significantly, like its oaks, to the Whiggish City's global trade on which the countryside depends" (201). But more importantly, in the future, the waterways of the world will work in harmony as England's ships sail to distant parts for trading, and in turn, distant peoples travel down the Thames in the name of commerce (Wasserman, 164). The Peace of Utrecht has partially assured this global balance of trade through the new-found peace between nations. During this commercial Golden Age, Britain's sons, safe from bloodshed, will peacefully tend flocks or reap crops from the prosperous countryside. The only remnant of Britain's bloody past will be the hunt; instead of sounding trumpets, cheerful horns, however, will be blown, and the only victims of the chase will be birds and beasts.

This global trading center promises unity for the world's people as well. The British will greet feathered people, who will in turn admire the English; although the foreigners will be shocked at the fair skin of the English, there will be a new concordia discors

between the vastly different peoples. As noted in the Williams edition of Windsor Forest, Pope's allusion here, apparently to the four Iroquois Indian chiefs who visited England in April of 1710 to the delight of the English, represents his vision of British regal reception of all the nations of the earth (Williams, 191).

Furthermore, in this worldwide prosperity, Peru's grandeur will be restored, and "other Mexico's [will] be roof'd with gold" (412).

It is here at the conclusion of the poem that the political and the pastoral meet, for the seed of this worldwide concordia discors has been planted by the Peace of Utrecht. Indeed, in the final stanza of Windsor Forest, the Muse is seen painting the green forests and the flowery plains, while Peace descends and scatters blessings from her wings. Windsor Forest is "at once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats."

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